

BOOKS OF THE WEEK SEEN IN REVIEW AND COMMENT

CRITICAL REVIEWS
OF THE SEASON'S
LATEST BOOKS

H. K. Webster's Idealized Portrait of the Modern American Girl—A Good Story of India and War. New Fiction by W. W. Jacobs, W. H. Hudson and Others—The New International Encyclopedia. Other Books.

THE THOROUGHbred. (The Robbs-Merrill Company.) By Henry Kitchell Webster. (\$1.35.)

The idealized portrait of the modern American girl is painted in bright and attractive colors by Henry Kitchell Webster in *The Thoroughbred* (The Robbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis) so as to appeal to the many young women who will see themselves mirrored in her. As it is a psychological romance improbabilities must be passed over. The heroine is married to a man who lets her have her own way; they have plenty of money and lead the usual life of fashion on which the author vents his sarcasm. She has fallen in love with her husband but will not admit it even to herself. When he announces that he is ruined and suggests that she divorce him so as to secure another establishment she loses her temper, hurls for a home in the tenement district, fascinates the males she comes across so that they help her schemes, does her

own housework, including washing, and shows her husband that they can live on his wages. They then enjoy a honeymoon in the slums of Chicago. The husband likes it so well that he is inclined to conceal the fact that he is becoming prosperous again; she suspects that he is deceiving her, but her love gets the better of her temper and she is able to settle their differences amicably and happily. The tone is light in spite of the author's earnestness in his preaching the contrast between the "live" people of the tenement districts and the shams of society.

DESMOND'S DAUGHTER. (G. P. Putnam's Sons.) By Maud Diver. In Maud Diver's story of "Desmond's Daughter" (G. P. Putnam's Sons) we have a hero who was afflicted with a shrinking spirit. To take in hand an intellectual and timid soul like young Vincent Leigh, to clasp him to the British army and send him off to the wild border fighting in India was a good idea, and the novelist has made skilful and interesting use of it. Vincent at home shunned his fellows. He found it agreeable to lie out of doors in lonely places and yield himself to psychological speculations. It was easy for him to write essays charged with philosophy of a very subtle character. It distressed him to consider the strife and turmoil of ordinary life. He was bashful, tongue tied in company. If he had to shake hands with a stranger his suffering was next to intolerable. It was a good thing for the timid Vincent to go into the army. "You—your despicable self! How dare you!" There was Vincent addressing himself to Blake, a fellow officer who had asked Gen. Desmond's daughter to let him kiss her. Blake retorted with vigor. He said: "You damned officious young prig, keep your hair on! It's no concern of yours what I choose

to say to a fool of a girl." But his remarks went no further, for Vincent knocked him down. It perplexed as well as pleased Vincent to find himself popular by reason of this incident. Why should an act so rude, so thoughtlessly spontaneous, so entirely unassisted by any conscious process of nice and determining reflection, be regarded with general favor? Possibly no analysis of the matter could account for it quite satisfactorily. But that part of the British army that knew about it was pleased. Vincent's Colonel grinned cordially at the end of his official investigation and invited the culprit to partake of refreshments.

The effect of Gen. Desmond's daughter upon Vincent and his effect upon her will be followed by the reader with keen interest. Miss Desmond was descended from a long line of military families, and lovely and charmingly feminine though she was it is still true that Vincent in loving her yielded his heart to a soldier. Plenty of romantic vigor marks the part of the story that pictures the siege of the border fort and the mountain battles with the nimble and terrible Afrids. For pathetic description it is not often that we find so moving a chapter as that which relates the reformation of Capt. Eden and the death of Mrs. Eden.

It is a pity that Vincent should have lost part of a leg in the desperate business of recovering the Khyber Pass from the control of the hostile tribes; still he had become a proved soldier by the time he met with that loss, and the misfortune weighed nothing against him in the sentiments of Gen. Desmond's daughter. An excellent story accomplished with unusual understanding and skill.

THE CASTAWAYS. (Charles Scribner's Sons.) By W. W. Jacobs. (\$1.35.)

We feel grateful to W. W. Jacobs for leaving out all reference to the war in his facetious parody, *The Castaways* (Charles Scribner's Sons) in which for a change his comical seafaring men play only a minor part. It is a shadowy sort of a story in which the people though distinct enough slip in and out as in a fog. A drudge in a bank inheriting an immense amount of money, sufficient for him to carry out any whim of Mr. Jacobs. He picks out a pompous fellow clerk as a companion, and his complete optimism overcomes any danger to which he may be exposed. The two run across a life man, whose marked characteristic is the British equivalent for freshness, and who acts like a confidence man. He leads them to buy automobiles and a country estate and to make the acquaintance of ladies. The consequence is an elderly romance that is favored by a yachting excursion around the world, a mock mutiny and a Robinson Crusoe episode on a coral island. With the servants Mr. Jacobs indulges in his more familiar forms of humor; the story of the boy with the toothache, the chauffeur and the housemaid is extremely funny.

A CRYSTAL AGE. (E. P. Dutton & Co.) By W. H. Hudson. (\$1.50.)

Of the romances by W. H. Hudson that after the lapse of many years are coming to the notice of a wider public than the circle which appreciated them at the start, none perhaps is so clear cut and so poetic as *A Crystal Age* (E. P. Dutton & Co.). It is like a perfect lyric. Journeys into a new world have been attempted before, but here the awakening of the man living our life into the world of ages hereafter when all memory of our civilization shall have been lost comes about simply and naturally. What philosophical or economic dreams the author may have had are of minor consequence; what persists is the beauty of the world he describes, which, is no imaginary world but that which the naturalist who is a poet sees, and the exquisite charm and simplicity of the love story. We trust that this new edition will attract more

readers who can understand what is true literature to enjoy the work of a great artist.

JIMMY'S WIFE. (John Lane Company.) By Jessie Champion. (\$1.35.)

A kind hearted and broad minded vicar's wife who takes a healthy interest in the affairs of her neighbors and is making a scientific study of romance keep the readers of *Jimmy's Wife* (John Lane Company), by Jessie Champion, amused until the end. The lady hopes to bring about a love match between a young man whom she likes and an actress. The professor investigates the same couple with indiscreet curiosity. They find out soon that the man is married but separated from his wife, but the courting goes on just the same. After a time the lady, who is the narrator, suspects that the actress is the wife, but she is put off the right track. In the final solution it turns out that she was correct, but the few chapters a plot of despicable villainy contrived by a scientific woman is revealed that jars with the tone of comedy and with the amiable people and manners that fill the story, and the war is dragged in. The professor manages to become entangled in a love affair of his own.

THE BEETLE. (G. P. Putnam's Sons.) By Richard Marsh. (\$1.50.)

The first part of Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (G. P. Putnam's Sons), in which a homeless outcast tells of his wanderings and sufferings in a dreary London night until he crawls into a house where a horrible and mysterious creature hypnotizes him, is a brilliant and artistic piece of work. The author conveys to his readers very vividly the terror, the loathing, the feeling of supernatural agencies which fill the unfortunate victim, and arouses the craving for an explanation. The story is then taken up by three other narrators of different temperaments, which is unfortunate, because it involves many repetitions which draw the attention away from the mystic element, so that we revert to the usual methods of mystery tales. The second narrator is an impulsive scientist, who brings in a humorous touch but confuses the tale with his love affairs; next it is taken up by an obstinate and reckless girl who gets into bad trouble, and finally an intuitive amateur detective disentangles the thread. The worship of the power of the occult, of hypnotism and various Oriental abominations are employed by the evildoer and provide a full dose of horror.

BETTY TREVOR. (G. P. Putnam's Sons.) By Mrs. George De Horne Valzey. (\$1.25.)

The young people in Mrs. George De Horne Valzey's *Betty Trevor* (G. P. Putnam's Sons) are delightful and natural. There is a family of five who are poor, a rich girl who is an only child, and a young married woman who has not grown up, all living in the same little London square. The heroine tries hard to overcome her discontent with the disagreeable things poverty forces upon her, but has some pretty good times. She has a dear little sister who speaks the truth at awkward times, while a pair of twins are constantly in mischief. The description of the elaborate preparations for the party for homeless ladies, to which only Betty Trevor is charming. There is an interesting elderly Yorkshire and a curious adventure in a London fog. Then the author jumps suddenly six years, making them all grow up, with results that are not wholly satisfactory because she does not take time enough to explain.

AFRAID. (John Lane Company.) By Sidney Dark. (\$1.35.)

A curious study of a sensitive boy who is afraid of physical pain is made by Sidney Dark in *Afraid* (John Lane Company). His father discovers the boy's fear and despises him. Instead of helping him to get over it he sends him to boarding school. There the other boys find out his falling and make him miserable. He feels that he has lost his father and his sister and that he must live a lonesome life. He attends a public school and makes a friend, but he will not play games, proclaims his lack of courage and thereby loses his friend. He submits to a bad beating, however, rather than do what he decides is wrong. He next goes to London into a solicitor's office, where he meets another pariah. This is a

Jew who is shunned because he is a money lender's son. With him he strikes a queer sort of acquaintance, and meets his sister, an advanced modern woman, proud of her race and eager for notice. He becomes engaged to her, but she fails her, through his cowardice, when she tries to get arrested as a suffragist. The pictures of this Jewish family are as interesting as the Jew's psychology. In his hour of need his father, who has thought the matter over, comes to his aid. The coming together of the two again is a beautiful picture of human nature, and when the war comes he enlists and gives his life to save another's, though at the time he is fighting the fear within him.

The New International.

With the last three volumes, 21 to 23, containing in alphabetical order the articles from Tartaglia to Zyrans, the second, revised edition of *The New International Encyclopedia* (Dodd, Mead & Co.) is completed and the full use of that extremely useful and valuable publication is secured for those who consult it. As we have pointed out in the notices of the previous volume as they successively came out, the revision has been so thorough that the Encyclopedia is essentially a new work. It has been prepared with such remarkable speed that the first volumes are as much up to date for all practical purposes as the last. The editors have had in mind always the aim to supply the best work that is needed at the moment in the form that is most convenient for those who have no time to lose, and therefore, instead of elaborate treatises,

many short articles defining terms and explaining portions of the subjects are supplied, while in the biographies the living have been included with the dead, the criterion being the need of the public to know something about the matter, one that is maintained in the selection of all the other articles as well. The result is the most convenient and useful encyclopedia for ready reference that we have in this country, one that is particularly handy in the thin paper edition. The many illustrations serve to elucidate the text, but in the maps it does not rise above the usual American standard.

Accompanying the Encyclopedia and bound like it is a very interesting volume of *Courses of Reading and Study* for which Simeon Strunsky is responsible. It is an ingenious and we should say successful attempt to combine the advantages of the treatise encyclopedias, such as the old time Britannica was, with those of the modern, succinct, practical ones. An outline plan of study for each of the arts and sciences, history, literature,

philosophy, mathematics, chemistry and so on, is made out for each subdivision of it, however minute, and the student is referred to the article in the "New International" that deals with the subject. The detailed outlines are worked out excellently and

the volume, while it will be most effective when used with the "New International," can be employed profitably also with any other encyclopedia built on the same plan. It is a very helpful guide and opens up new lines for encyclopedias.

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Has Balfour Spiked the
Guns of Prussian Logic?

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Balfour, in his note supplementing the Entente's reply to President Wilson's request for a statement of peace terms, declares that he does "not believe peace can be durable if it be not based upon the success of the Allied cause."

Apparently, one of the objects of this new communication was to convince the American public that the changes in the map of Europe suggested in the previous note of the Entente Allies would prevent future wars.

On the other hand, the pro-German "Fatherland," of New York, dismisses the Allies' terms as under no circumstances the possible basis for permanent peace and holds up the "principles of nationality" for ridicule.

In THE LITERARY DIGEST for January 27th, the leading article deals with Mr. Balfour's note and by quoting the opinions of editorial observers of widely differing sentiment, reflects public opinion in this country upon the subject in a most comprehensive way.

Among other articles of unusual interest in this week's issue are:

Canadian, French, and German Papers Rap President Wilson

Express Belief That His Writings Do Not Represent Real Public Opinion in United States

Convicting a German Consul-General of Bomb-Plots

What the German Press Thinks of the Entente's Reply to Wilson

Painless Photography

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